

Clean quarters, clean corners



To minimise the risk of infections, a focus on disinfecting touch points is essential.

By **Murray McDonald**

The cleaning process in aged care goes one step beyond most commercial requirements, as the elderly are more susceptible to illness and germs and have a harder time recovering once they're infected.

Aged-care cleaning requirements centre on the need for infection control, specifically to prevent outbreaks of norovirus gastroenteritis, MRSA and VRE, which are common in the sector.

A key part of minimising these infections is routinely deep cleaning all touch points.

Touch points are high-contact surfaces. This puts them at the greatest risk of harbouring bacteria. They can be large surfaces, such as komo chairs, or smaller items such as door handles, but they are all used daily.

The following are areas of aged-care facilities that contain various touch points and the best ways to ensure they are not overlooked during cleaning.

RESIDENTS' ROOMS

A resident's room is one of the most critical areas for a deep clean. It is where many residents spend most hours of their day, and where visitors and staff regularly come into contact with them.

Key touch points in a resident's room include the telephone, light switch, bed frame, bedside table items and door knobs (including knobs on bedside tables etc). It

can be easy to overlook surfaces such as telephones or items on tables because they are not "fixed" in place and are regularly moved around.

Traditionally, surfaces such as these are cleaned using a cloth and detergent. And it is common to see many people focusing on the type of chemical to use and overlooking the type of cloth. However, the cloth is just as important as the chemical. Common cloths will just move dirt and bacteria from one surface to another, rather than picking them up.

Microfibre cloths, in contrast, are designed to pick up residue, dust and bacteria. They can be applied wet or dry and are regularly used to clean touch points. Microfibre is a synthetic textile fibre, usually composed of fine nylon or polyester strands. Also unlike regular cloth, microfibre cloth is reusable.

BATHROOMS

Patient bathrooms are amongst the most important areas in which to ensure touch points are thoroughly disinfected. If they are not well cleaned, there is an extremely high risk they will contaminate other parts of a facility. A rule of thumb is if the bathroom isn't clean, then the rest isn't clean.

Touch point disinfecting in a bathroom is done via thorough detail cleaning. Key areas include the toilet seat and bowl,

sink and shower taps, doorknobs and the corners where the floor and walls meet. Wall corners are not technically touch points, but they can come into regular contact with a resident's walking frame or wheelchair, which can then transfer bacteria to the rest of the facility.

Using high-temperature steam at more than 160° will kill all bacteria. Steam is a vapour; it will get into all awkward crevices, which bathrooms have plenty of. But it is important that when choosing a steam machine you check it comes with a variety of tools and attachments in order to clean all bathroom touch points, not just flat surfaces.

For mould removal, high-temperature steam is one of the only methods that works and prevents the mould from coming back. Common fixes, such as chemicals, will clean the mould but spores will remain.

In that case, not only will the mould grow back but also it can lead to respiratory problems in your residents.

For many facilities, disinfecting touch points is just as important as regular handwashing. If doing so is integrated into the cleaning process, the likelihood of outbreaks and infections will dramatically decrease for both residents and staff. ■

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